

Grand Forks
Air Force Base
in
Action!

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THE WARRIOR

Stories and photos by the 319th Air Refueling Wing Public Affairs Office, Grand Forks Air Force Base, N.D.



Surviving and operating



Photo by Airman 1st Class Ashley Coomes

Grand Forks Air Force Base Airmen prepare for war with combat skills training, which provides realistic training for the challenging Air Force mission.

By Airman 1st Class Patrice Clarke
Public affairs

You're in a convoy. You only have one mile until your destination but this last mile is said to be the worst. Then the unthinkable happens, your convoy comes under attack.

Deployed Airmen can find themselves in this situation when they participate in convoys throughout Iraq.

Lessons learned from deployments have identified training deficiencies in the way the Air Force prepares some of its Airmen for possible combat.

In order to ensure that all Airmen receive the basic skills and knowledge for operating in a combat zone, the Air Force recently instituted a Combat Skills Readiness training program for all deploying personnel.

CST at Grand Forks Air Force Base is a three day course designed to give Airmen realistic preparation before deploying.

"The Air Force is sending Airmen into combat zones; something we haven't done before," said Capt. James Wiese, officer in charge of combat skills training. "This training is a crash course for Airmen who might be put in these sort of situations."

During CST, Airmen receive training on land navigation, patrolling, facility hardening and rifle-fighting techniques to name a few. They also get training on field maintaining and cleaning the M-16A2 rifle, self aid buddy care and tactical vehicle training.

The scenarios are realistic with Airmen and offi-

cers training together.

"I was really nervous about coming to this training at the beginning," said Airman 1st Class Daniel Urbanski. "But the information they presented was extremely helpful."

"I didn't know how hard it was to get in and out of a humvee," said Airman Wyatt, 319th Communications Squadron. "It's not something you do every day and if you are not prepared you can hurt yourself."

"The information they are giving us is extremely useful," said Lt. Col. Gerald Perkins. "Some people think they are deploying to MacDill Air Force Base, Fla. but end up in the desert. This is the information they can use."

A recent class also got a lesson in media training when reporters from WDAZ, KVLX, KXJB, and the Grand Forks Herald interviewed them.

"The media is intensely interested in how our Airmen train and fight the Global War on Terrorism, particularly in Grand Forks where the community is so supportive," said Capt. Mike Meridith, 319th Air Refueling Wing public affairs. "Opportunities like this give Airmen an idea of how to respond when the media sticks a microphone in their face."

According to trainers, combat situations are no longer the exception and Airmen need to be prepared. CST, along with other training, gives them the experience needed to survive and carry out the mission.

Future leaders see Airmen's view

Cadet 3rd Class Jesse Mortensen
Public Affairs

Thirteen cadets from the Air Force Academy and Reserve Officer Training Corps recently had the opportunity to experience first-hand the operational Air Force right here. This three-week Operation Air Force program allowed cadets to work in areas such as civil engineering, maintenance, public affairs, medical and communications.

The intent is to let cadets shadow enlisted personnel to better understand their everyday lives.

"I got a good idea of what enlisted people do for a living, it helped me realize that the Air Force is definitely where I want to be," said Cadet 3rd Class Paul Caruso.

While under the training and mentorship of senior non-commissioned officers the cadets underwent the same upgrade training that many Airmen do.

This in-depth view gave cadets a better

understanding of the Air Force and the hard work that keeps it running.

"It gave me a new perspective on how Airmen work day to day. It gave me a view of the links that make up the chain," said Cadet 3rd Class Clinton Ricks. "It helped me understand the Airmen that I will soon be leading."

"I learned a lot about the enlisted side of the Air Force, this definitely helps me to better understand how I can lead as an officer," said Cadet 3rd Class Patrick Roks.

Community leaders command off base

Capt. Michael Meridith
Public affairs

Although they don't work here and many have never worn a uniform, there is a group of local men and women who play a critically important role in the life of the 319th Air Refueling Wing every day.

These business and community leaders are a mainstay at nearly every major wing function, and many are involved in the dozens of charitable programs that support base Airman and their families; including the annual holiday cookie drive, Military Appreciation Day, the quarterly and annual awards programs, and Summer Bash -- just to name a few.

Some of these leaders are known as "honorary commanders," part of a program that matches the wing commander and vice commander and each squadron and group commander (including the director of staff) with a civilian counterpart.

"It [the honorary commander program] has helped us foster a positive, long-term partnership with the community, which you see reflected every day. It is one of the things that makes an assignment to Grand Forks such a positive experience," said Col. Reese, wing vice commander, during the honorary commander induc-

tion ceremony earlier this year.

Each year, wing leadership works in consultation with the Grand Cities Chamber of Commerce's Military Affairs Committee to select these commanders. By tradition, the honorary wing commander is the chairman of the MAC and the honorary vice wing commander is the vice chairman.

Another, smaller group, is known as "ambassadors." These are individuals whose support and lasting contributions to the wing exemplify the patriotism of the Grand Cities and as such, they are usually appointed for life.

Recently, the wing added another position: the honorary wing commander emeritus. This lifetime position is currently held by John Marshall, a local lawyer who was the wing's honorary commander for 25 years.

Speaking about these programs during the induction ceremony earlier this year, honorary wing commander Dennis Potter said, "[The programs provide] community members with a better understanding of the professional and personal lives of military families and what goes on at the base. In turn, we provide the military families a look into our lives and provide a window into community activities."

Base spreads volunteer spirit

By Senior Airman James Croxon
Public affairs

Imagine you are an 80-year old woman, living alone with no nearby family. Now, imagine one morning you woke up to three feet of water in the basement, dozens of downed trees and a message from the American Red Cross telling you they won't be able to help for up to two weeks.

That was what Dr. Esther Leser, a former University of North Dakota language professor, woke up to on the morning of June 27 after a large storm.

"The Red Cross said that with all the damage the storm produced they wouldn't be able to get to me right away," said Dr. Leser. "They suggested I call the base to get some help."

Although she was a long-term base supporter, Dr. Leser was apprehensive about calling for help at first.

"We got her phone call at 8 a.m.," said Mr. Tom Slaughter, Family Readiness consultant. "By 10 a.m., 15 volunteers were ready to go."

By the end of the week, 30 volunteers were hard at work cutting down stricken trees. Many of the volunteers brought their own chainsaws, wood splitters and other tools.

Within a few days, chaotic piles of fallen trees were turned into organized stacks of fireplace-sized logs.

"I was surprised to see as many volunteers as I did," said Master Sgt. Kevin Waldeck, 319th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron. "It gave a lot of the volunteers a first-time taste of volunteerism and renewed the community spirit for veteran volunteers like myself."

Service excellence leads to DoD recognition

By Airman 1st Class Patrice Clarke
Public affairs

John Hanson found out he had been named the 2005 Outstanding Department of Defense employee with a disability when his commander informed him of a short notice tasking that needed to be taken care of right away.

"I was sitting at my desk when Maj. Shawna O'Brien (319th Mission Support Squadron commander) came and told me she had something that needed to be done," said Mr. Hanson. The tasking, however, turned out to be getting some photos taken for Headquarters Air Force because he had just won the distinction.

However, Mr. Hanson's story doesn't start here, it begins 30 years ago.

"When I was a kid I had an uncle who lived in the Fargo-Moorhead, area when the base was just getting set up. He took me over to the site and showed me and what the contractors and military personnel were doing

to set the base up. Years later, I was in the Air Force, stationed in Virginia, with the options of going to Ellsworth, S.D., a base in Vietnam or Grand Forks. Because of my past experience, I chose to go to Grand Forks and have never regretted it."

After a tour at Grand Forks, he went on to other bases and eventually received an honorable discharge and returned to Grand Forks as a civilian. "I liked the people," he said when asked why. After returning, he joined the North Dakota Army National Guard.

When Mr. Hanson was finally discharged from the military he received more than 60 percent disability for injuries sustained while in the service. Despite his disability, Mr. Hanson has continually strived to help others.

Mr. Hanson recently retired as an American Red Cross volunteer with more than 29 years of service.

However, his service hasn't stopped there. Mr. Hanson is also very involved in veteran's issues and was recently appointed by the governor of North

Dakota to serve as a member of the state's Administrative Committee on Veterans Affairs.

"For many years, veteran's issues have been lying dormant and now there are people out there who bring those issues to the forefront so veterans can get the assistance they need." He said.

Mr. Hanson's efforts have had tangible results for veterans.

"I was recently talking to Senator Kent Conrad about veteran's health insurance issues. We drafted something up and he took it to the Senate floor. That's making a difference."

Mr. Hanson's spirit of service, both as an Airman and civilian, exemplify his attitude that a disability shouldn't be a barrier to "making a difference."

We all have the ability to overcome any of life's challenges and not let it stop us," he said. "You might think you have it bad but then you see someone else who's in a wheelchair, building race cars. Everyone has the ability to overcome."

Base, community continue OEF

By Senior Airman James Croxon
Public affairs

A unique partnership between the base, the University of North Dakota, the North Valley Arts Council and a host of other community organizations kicked off its third year during a ceremonial "ticket tearing" at the theater here recently.

The partnership, dubbed "Operation Enduring Friendship" began in May of 2003 and has since provided nearly \$400,000 in free or discounted tickets to area athletic, cultural and entertainment events to Airman and their families.

"OEF really demonstrates why the Grand Cities deserved to win the Abilene Trophy," said Capt. Paul Swenson, 319th Services Squadron commander, referring to the area's recent win of Air Mobility

Command's coveted community support award.

"While many bases reap the occasional benefit of free or reduced tickets, usually to hard-to-sell events, the Grand Forks community freely gives its military population the opportunity to see the best programs and activities."

Those sentiments were echoed by Airman 1st Class, Patrice Clarke, former Airman's Activity Council president, who described how OEF affected her initial impressions of her assignment here.

"I was convinced the active social life I had in Texas would disappear in Grand Forks," Airman Clarke said. She added, "From watching motocross for the first time to actually becoming a college hockey fan, this program and this community has changed my outlook."

Representatives from UND, NOVAC and other OEF organizations were unanimous in their praise of

the hard work and sacrifices of Warriors of the North and their families.

Many, like Phil Harmeson, senior associate to the UND president, commenting that OEF was just "one small thing" they [the community] could do to say thanks.

"The regional arts community is proud to support the base," said Nicole Derenne, NOVAC executive director.

Those feelings were also conveyed by UND President, Dr. Charles Kupchella who added "what you do every day makes it possible for us to do our job."

Col. Bill Bender, 319th Air Refueling Wing commander expressed the base's appreciation for the support simply, saying "this program is about celebrating the bond of friendship we have with our neighbors in the community. We thank you."

Base houses move to new homes

By Master Sgt. Scott Davis
Public affairs

The base's ongoing support of Operation Walking Shield took another step forward in August as contractors began moving the first of 18 housing units designated for donation to Native American communities in western North Dakota.

Operation Walking Shield was established in 1994 as a collaborative effort between 35 tribes and seven government agencies, including the Department of Defense.

"It's a win-win situation," said Chris Powell, housing flight chief. "We're able to help the Native American community with good homes, while at the same time saving taxpayer money."

The houses are in generally good condition, according to Mr. Powell, but a detailed cost analysis showed it would be cheaper for the base to build new

ones rather than renovate existing units.

So far, the base has donated more than 460 excess housing units to 11 tribes in North Dakota, South Dakota and Minnesota as part of the program. North Dakota's Turtle Mountain and Fort Berhold tribes will receive the seven duplexes and four single-family homes that are being moved this summer.

The three- and four-bedroom units average 1,300 square feet and were built in the early 1960s. Bottineau House Moving in Bottineau, N.D., and Arrowhead Construction in Waltham, N.D., were contracted by the base to move the homes.

The primary aim of Operation Walking Shield is to improve the quality of life for Native American tribes through infrastructure development, community development, medical and dental care.



Photo by Airman 1st Class Patrice Clarke

The Grand Forks Honor Guard presented the colors at the Metrodome in Minneapolis during a Minnesota Twins baseball game in August.
